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ST MS 680: Contemporary Cults

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ST/MS680: CONTEMPORARY CULTS (3)

Tuesday/Thursday, 9:30-10:45 A.M.

Steven Tsoukalas (Adjunct Faculty, ATS)

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 12:00-2:00pm in BC336; Home phone: 858-0032

I. Course Description:

A study of the historical and theological origins and development of cultic phenomena in contemporary American religion.

II. Learning Goals:

After successfully completing this course, students should be able to . . .

- A. Generate a working definition(s) of pseudo- and non-Christian cults and engage critically other definitions.
- B. Discern the major theological errors of cults (and some aberrant groups) and engage critically their beliefs and practices from the standpoint of biblical faith / classical Christian orthodoxy.
- C. Show familiarity with the history and basic beliefs of several cultic groups.
- D. Demonstrate awareness of the sociological atmosphere of various cults.
- E. Utilize all the above to . . .
 1. Know God more deeply by better understanding certain essential doctrines of Christianity.
 2. Develop strategies for presenting the biblical Christ and his gospel to adherents of these groups.
 3. Be able to equip the body of Christ for the same.

III. Required Texts:

Sire, James. *Scripture Twisting: Twenty Ways the Cults Misread the Bible*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1980.

Stark, Rodney, and William Sims Bainbridge. *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

Tsoukalas, Steven. *Masonic Rites and Wrongs: An Examination of Freemasonry*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995.

Tucker, Ruth. *Another Gospel: Alternative Religions and the New Age Movement*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989.

*In addition to the above (approx. 1,100 pages), students are required to research **primary source** cultic literature toward the submission of a research paper.

**Following are books on reserve in library: (Tsoukalas) *Knowing Christ in the Challenge of Heresy*, (Jehovah's Witnesses) *Should You Believe in the Trinity?*, *Insight on the Scriptures* (2 vols.), *Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures*, *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, (Mormonism) *Book of Mormon*, *Book of Mormon/Doctrine and Covenants/Pearl of Great Price* (all three in one vol.), *Mormon Doctrine*, (Christian Science) *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*.

Recommended Texts

Martin, Walter. *The Kingdom of the Cults*. Revised, updated and expanded. Hank Hanegraaff, gen. ed. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1997.

Tsoukalas, Steven. *Knowing Christ in the Challenge of Heresy: A Christology of the Cults, a Christology of the Bible*. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1999.

IV. Requirements:

A. Read the required texts *and* primary source material from one cultic group. Primary source reading should be geared toward writing your research paper. No reading report is required, *but* your mid-term examination, final examination and research paper grades will be lower if you fail to interact with the reading and class lectures. Thus, in this sense good attendance is required.

B. Make one visit to a cult meeting or service, and write a reflection / observation paper on your visit (2-3 pages, 1-inch margins around paper, and double-spaced with 12-point Times New Roman font). Your paper must include certain ethnographic information, including mentioning *what* was taught and *how* it was taught. These papers are due anytime during the semester, but no later than at the time of the *start* of the final examination. There is a ten-point penalty for each day late (even papers handed in on the day of the final, but after the final itself, will be considered one day late). You will also be penalized for an excessive amount of grammatical errors and an excess of typos. (20% of grade)

C. A research paper (10-12 pages, 1-inch margins all around, and double-spaced with 12-point Times New Roman font) on *one* area of doctrine of a cult. Interaction with the required reading and with the cult's primary source material is expected, along with biblical responses. No bibliography is required. Students are required to discuss their paper topic with the instructor before starting research.

Proper footnoting (please use footnotes, not endnotes) and style as found in Slade's *Form and Style* (11th ed.), chapter 7 ("Chicago Manual of Style"), is required. Also, consult *Form and Style*, pp. 34-38. Note that titles of books, journals, etc. may be *italicized* rather than underlined if you desire. Also note that you will suffer loss of grade points due to an excessive amount of grammatical errors, grossly incorrect style, and an excess of typos.

Papers are due on Friday, December 6, no later than 4:00 p.m., outside BC 336 (place in box outside the door). Any paper passed in after that time will be considered one day late, and after 4:00 p.m. on December 7, two days late, etc. There is a ten-point-per-day loss of grade. (50% of grade)

Additional note: You are welcome to use my library for research, by appointment only. No books may be taken home.

D. A mid-term (75 min.) examination and a final examination (2 hrs.). Both examinations are essay and identification. For essays you are expected to interact with the reading and class lectures. The final pertains to material from the whole semester. You may use a Bible for the mid-term and the final, providing there are no notes from class in it. (Average of two exams — 30% of grade)

V. Class Schedule

Week 1

1. Course introduction. Introduction to the Cults. **Reading for next class:** Tucker, 11-30; Sire, 7-39.
2. The person and work of Christ. **Reading for next class:** Tucker, 93-116; 191-216. Sire, 41-88.

Week 2

3. Jehovah's Witnesses: Showing of the video *Jehovah's Witnesses: The Organization Behind the Name* (primary source). Discussion. **Reading for next class:** Tucker, 117-48.

[Beginning with class #4, photocopies of the overheads used in the week's lectures may be found in the library in folders on the reserve shelf for this course. They will be on the shelf no later than the Monday before classes, 3:00 p.m.]

4. Jehovah's Witnesses: Beliefs and Christian response. **Reading for next class:** Sire, 89-125; Tucker, 231-43.

Week 3

5. Jehovah's Witnesses: Beliefs and Christian response. **Reading for next class:** Sire, 127-63.
6. Jehovah's Witnesses: Beliefs and Christian response. **Reading for next class:** Tucker, 49-91; Stark and Bainbridge, chapters 1,2,6,8,9. Discussion questions for Stark and Bainbridge will be distributed in order to facilitate discussion for week 5, class #9.

Week 4

7. Mormonism: Beliefs and Christian response. **Reading for next class:** Stark and Bainbridge, chapters 10,12,13.
8. Mormonism: Beliefs and Christian response. **Reading for next class:** Stark and Bainbridge, chapters 14,18,19,21.

Week 5

9. Mormonism: Video showing of *Our Heavenly Father's Plan* (primary source) followed by discussion. Discussion of Stark and Bainbridge. **Reading for next class:** Tucker, 319-55.
10. The New Age Movement: Basic beliefs and Christian response. **Reading for next class:** Tucker, 299-318; 357-88.

Week 6

11. Yoga and Christians. Scientology. **Reading for next class:** Tucker, 389-98 (as you read the various *Cultic Statements of Belief*, keep in mind the definitions behind the terms used).
12. Introduction to the Occult. Introduction to Modern-day Witchcraft (Wicca).

Week 7

13. Mid-term examination. **Begin Reading** Tsoukalas, ix-xii, 1-42.

14. Showing of the video *Witchcraft: Yesterday and Today*, by Raymond Buckland (primary source), teaching the history, beliefs and practices of Wicca. Discussion.
Reading for next class: Tsoukalas, 43-176.

Week 8

15. Freemasonry: (A) Discussion on the subject of whether or not Freemasonry is a religion. (B) The teachings of Freemasonry and Christian response. **Reading for next class:** Tsoukalas, 177-228.
16. Freemasonry: (B, cont.) The teachings of Freemasonry and Christian response. Discussion: What are churches to do? **Reading for next class:** Tucker, 285-98.

Week 9

17. The Baha'i Faith. Unitarianism. **Reading for next class:** Tucker, 149-76.
18. Christian Science. **Reading for next class:** Tucker, 177-90.

Week 10

19. Unity School of Christianity. Religious Science. **Reading for next class:** Tucker, 267-84.
20. The Word-Faith Movement.

Week 11

21. The Word-Faith Movement. **Reading for next class:** Tucker, 245-66.
22. The Unification Church.

Week 12

23. The Nation of Islam (Black Muslims) / United Pentecostal Church.
24. **No class on Thursday, November 21.**

Week 13: Reading Week

Week 14

25. Transcendental Meditation. The Spiritualist Church. **Reading for next class:** Tucker, 217-30.
26. The Way International. Where do we go from here?: Class discussion on (A) preventive preaching and teaching, (B) how to keep ourselves continually informed, (C) creating opportunities for cult evangelism. Discussion: What is your definition of a cult?

*This syllabus is subject to change.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Consult the extensive bibliography for this course in the *Lecture Power Points* folder through email, marked "ST/MS-Contemp cults." A hardcopy is also provided in the Library on the reserve shelf for this course.